

AN
ESSAY
ON THE
OPER A's
After the Italian Manner,
Which are about to be Establish'd on the
ENGLISH STAGE:

With some Reflections on the Damage which
they may bring to the Publick.

By Mr. Dennis.

*Negat enim Mutari posse Musicas Leges sine Mutatione
Legum Publicarum.*

Cic. De Legibus Lib. 2.

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ESSAY

ON THE

OPERATION

After the British manner,

Which are supposed to be described in the

ENGLISH STAGE:

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104

By



Printed by J. D. ...
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The P R E F A C E.

THIS small Treatise is only levell'd against those Opera's which are entirely Musfical; for those which are Drammatical may be partly defended by the Examples of the Ancients. We have endeavour'd to shew in the following Treatise, that the English Stage is like to be overthrown by the Progress of these new Opera's; it would be easie here to shew the Importance of that Stage to the Publick: That People must and will have Diversions, and that a great and flourishing People will have publick Diversions, that if the Government does not take care to provide reasonable Diversions for them, they will not fail to provide such for themselves as are without Reason. That unreasonable ones are pernicious to Government, and that reasonable ones are advantagious to it; that pleasure of Sense being too much indulged, makes Reason cease to be a Pleasure, and by consequence is contrary both to publick and private Duty. That the Drama of all reasonable Diversions is the best that has ever been invented at once to delight and instruct the World, that it has never flourish'd but in Three or Four of the bravest Nations that have been since the World began, and that in the most flourishing States of those Nations, and that

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a People must have a very good share of Virtue as well as Understanding before they can receive it among them, that it is so very agreeable to good Government, that most of the great Men who have writ of the Art of Governing, from Plato down to Harrington, have writ either Plays or Directions, or Rules for the Stage. That some of the greatest Monarchs and greatest Ministers of State have not only encourag'd Plays, but have writ them themselves; that some of the greatest Philosophers have done the same, that here in England indeed Two or Three formal affected Bigots have endeavour'd to contradict all these and the common Sense of Men, and upon a pretence of making all Men good Christians, which Christ and his Apostles have so often told us never will be, have actually made Thousands ten times worse than they would have been without them. That the consequence of their Writings has been, that Plays have been for some Years discourag'd, and Diversions establiish'd in the room of them, that have really been and are like to be ten times more prejudicial to the Publick than ever Plays were pretended to be. That one of those Diversions has been gaming, which has done unspeakable harm to both Sexes in every part of the Town: That gaming, since the publishing the Books against the Stage has increas'd Ten-fold, and that the number of Bankrupts during that time has been as much augmented; that the number of Cuckolds in all likely-kind has advanc'd proportionably: That gaming, by
giving

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giving Men a privilege to be familiar with, and sometimes rude to Women, removes that awe which Nature has plac'd between the Sexes as the strongest Bulwark of Chastity; that when a young Lady ev'n of the strictest and most unblemish'd Honour, looses a Summ of Money, which she dares not own to her Relations, and which she cannot pay without them, and looses it to a young agreeable Fellow, who perhaps loves her, and has a secret Design upon her, she finds a Temptation that tries her utmost Virtue.

We have endeavour'd to shew in the following Treatise, by the force of Reason, that the Italian Opera, another Entertainment, which is about to be establish'd in the room of Plays, is a Diversion of more pernicious consequence, than the most licentious Play that ever has appear'd upon the Stage. It would be no hard matter to support those Proofs by the Authorities of some of the most celebrated Authors among the Ancients and Moderns, but we shall content our selves with that of Boileau, because he is equally fam'd for Judgment and Sincerity, excepting Matters in which his King is concern'd, and is known by all the World to be perfectly Master of the Subject. Let us see then what this celebrated Author, who has approv'd of Plays, in so solemn and publick a manner, says in relation to Operas. The Passage is in his Tenth Satyr, which is writ by way of Letter to a Friend to advise him not to marry.

L'Epouse

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L'Epouse que Tu prens, sans tache en sa conduite,
 Aux Vertus m'a-t-on dit, dans Port Royal instruite.
 Aux Loix de son Devoir regle tous ces Desirs;
 Mais qui peut t'asseurer, qu'invincible aux Plaisirs,
 Chez toi dans une vie ouverte à la licence,
 Elle conservera sa premiere innocence ?
 Par toi même bien tôt conduite à l'Opera,
 De quel air pensés-tu, que ta Sainte verra
 D'un spectacle enchanteur la Pompe Harmonieuse,
 Ces Danses, ces Heros à voix Luxurieuse;
 Entendra ces Discours sur l'amour seul Roulans,
 Ces doucereux Renauds, ces Insensés Rolands.
 Sçaura d'eux qu'à l'amour comme au seul Dieu supreme,
 On doit immoler tout, jusques à la Vertu même:
 Qu'on ne sçauroit trop tôt se laisser enflammer,
 Qu'on n'a reçu du Ciel un cœur que pour aimer;
 Et tous ces lieux communs de Morale Lubrique,
 Que Lully a rechauffé des sons de sa Musique ?
 Mais de quel Mouvement dans son cœur excitez,
 Sentira t'elle alors tous ses sens agités ?
 Je ne te repons pas qu'au retour moins timide,
 Digne Ecoliere enfin, d'Angelique ou d'Armide;
 Elle n'aille à l'instant pleine de ces doux sons,
 Avec quelque Medor pratiquer ces Leçons.
 Supposons toute fois qu'encore fidele & pure,
 Sa vertu de se choc revienne sans lessure.

Which is thus in English.

*The Wife of whom thou art about to make choice, having been
 hitherto unblemish'd in her Conduct, and brought up, as they tell
 us within Port Royal, in the Practice of every Virtue, regulates
 her Passions by Reasons severe Rule; but who can assure thee that
 she will still remain victorious over Pleasure, and still preserve her
 original Innocence, when thou hast once made her Mistress of her
 own Conduct? As soon as she is usher'd by her Uxorious Husband
 to the Opera, with what Air dost thou think the young Saint will
 behold the Harmonious Pomp of an enchanting Spectacle, those
 wanton Dances, those Heroes with luxurious Voices? With what
 Air dost thou think she will listen to a Discourse that rolls upon*

Love

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Love alone, to those mad Orlandos, and those melting Rinaldos; hearing from them that we ought to sacrifice all, nay, ev'n Virtue itself, to Love, as to the only supreme Divinity; that we can never suffer our selves to take Fire too soon, that bounteous Heaven has bestow'd a Heart upon us only that we might love; and all those common places of slippery Morals, to which Lully has given fresh Fire by the Charms of his Musick. Then how will she be melted, how transported, how will every Sense be shaken in her? I dare not assure thee, that as she comes back, throwing off that Awe which has hitherto been a restraint upon her, and having all her Soul possess'd with those melting Sounds, she does not instantly withdraw to some convenient Retirement, and with some young Medoro bring these fine Speculations to practise. Yet let us suppose for once, that she comes back as faithful and chaste as she went from this dangerous Shock, &c.

Nothing can be fuller than this Passage of Boileau; we could easily make it appear that Plato and Cicero are of the same Opinion, but what need can there be of Authorities, when we can shew by experience what Influence the soft and effeminate Measures of the Italian Opera has upon the Minds and Manners of Men. The Modern Italians have the very same Sun and Soil which the Antient Romans had, yet are their Manners directly opposite; their Men are neither Vertuous, nor Wise, nor Valiant, and they who have reason to know their Women, never trust them out of their sight. 'Tis impossible to give any reason of so great a Difference between the Ancient Romans, and the Modern Italians but only Luxury, and the Reigning Luxury of Modern Italy, is that soft and effeminate Musick which abounds in the Italian Opera. And if Musick of the same Nature has not as yet had the same

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same Influence on France, it is because the French Musick is by no means so meltingly moving as the Italian, and that the effect of the Charm has been in some measure retarded by the whole Nation's having been in Arms for so many Years together.

There is one Observation which naturally occurs here, and with which we shall conclude this Preface; and that is, that the Alterations which have been made in the Entertainment of the Stage for these last Ten Years, seem to have had some influence ev'n upon common Society. For as Sense upon the Stage seems to have given place to Sound, the same thing appears to have happen'd in familiar Conversation, which is reduc'd to such a Level among all sorts of People, as perhaps never was known in the World before. For go where you will, either among Cittis or Courtiers, among Men of Sense or Blockheads, the Conversation rolls most upon Two Points, which are News and Toasting. Now this is certain, that a very solemn dull Fool makes a very pretty News-monger; and a very empty, errant Coxcomb, a very accomplish'd Toaster.

Essay

Essay on the Opera's.

THere appears to have been of late Years, a Combination of all sorts of People, to set up Opera's, and Entertainments of Singing and Dancing in the room of Dramatick Poems. At a time when we are contending with our Enemies for our very Being; we are awkwardly Aping their Luxuries and their Vices, which we neglected or contemn'd while we were at full Peace with them; as if by a certain foreboding Delusion we were preparing our selves for Slavery, and endeavouring to make our selves agreeable to our new Masters.

But that so many People of great Quality, and of greater Parts, Lovers of their Country, and Encouragers of Art, and of Poetry more particularly, should prove so zealous in the encouraging and promoting Entertainments, which tend so directly to the Detriment of the Publick, to the Detriment of Arts, and especially of expiring Poetry; Entertainments which are so directly contrary to their Nobler Pleasures, and their real Interests, can proceed from nothing but from that Weight of Affairs which oppresses them, and deprives them of time and leisure to consider deliberately of these things.

There is no Man living, who has either a higher esteem than my self for their natural and acquir'd Endowments, or a greater Veneration for their restless Endeavours to promote the real good of their Country

in all other things. And I depend upon those great Qualities, upon their exquisite Discernment, their exact Justice, and their magnanimous Spirit of Liberty, when I presume to oppose a popular and prevailing Caprice, and to defend the English Stage, which together with our English Liberties has descended to us from our Ancestors, to defend it against that Deluge of Mortal Foes, which have come pouring in from the Continent, to drive out the Muses, its Old Inhabitants, and seat themselves in their stead; that while the English Arms are every where Victorious abroad, the English Arts may not be vanquish'd and oppress'd at home by the Invasion of Foreign Luxury.

There is no Man living who is more convinc'd than my self of the Power of Harmony, or more penetrated by the Charms of Musick. I know very well that Musick makes a considerable Part both of Eloquence and of Poetry; and therefore to endeavour to decry it fully, would be as well a foolish, as an ungrateful Task, since the very efforts which we should make against it, would only serve to declare its Excellence, it being impossible to succeed in them, but by supplies which we should borrow from its own Harmony. Musick may be made profitable as well as delightful, if it is subordinate to some nobler Art, and subservient to Reason; but if it presumes not only to degenerate from its ancient Severity, from its sacred Solemnity; but to set up for itself, and to grow independant, as it does in our late Opera's, it becomes a meer sensual Delight, utterly incapable of informing the Understanding, or of reforming the Will; and for that very Reason utterly unfit to be made a publick Diversion, and then the more charming it grows, it becomes the more pernicious. Since when it is once habitual, it must

must so far debauch the Minds of Men, as to make them incapable of those reasonable Diversions, which have got the just Possession of the Stage.

Thus unless we use timely Prevention, the British Muse is like to meet with the same Fate that *Tithonus* is said to have done of old, who had no other Fruit of his Immortality, than to see himself depriv'd by the length of Days, of all his Strength, his Spirit, and his Tow'ring Thoughts, and eaten and consum'd by the Jaws of Time, till nothing remain'd of him but an empty Voice.

'Tis undeniable, that in whatever Countries Opera's have been establish'd after the manner of *Italy*, they have driven out Poetry from among that People. 'Tis now more than a Hundred Years since the very species of Poets has disappear'd in *Italy*; and at present there is not so much as one Poet in so vast a Kingdom as *France*, allowing *Boileau* to be superannuated.

In the beginning of this War, we were perhaps the only People in *Europe*, who could justly boast of Freedom or of Poetry. We have indeed very bravely defended our Liberties, but we have at the same time abandon'd our Poetry to the very Nations who have attack'd the other, and by I know not what Whimsy of Fate, while in the Field we have been knocking their bravest Men on the Head, we have been caressing and hugging the Off-scowring of them at home.

That Poetry is like from the Progress of Musick, to have the same Fate in *England*, that it met with in *France* and *Italy*; we have very good reason to believe, when we consider that of late Years, they who have had some Talent for writing, have, for the most part, still writ worse and worse, and when that which has been well writ, has been worse received by our Au-

diences ; when those Audiences will hardly suffer a Play, that is not interlarded with Singing and Dancing, whereas these are become Theatrical Entertainments, without any thing of the Drama, when our People of Quality utterly neglecting English Comedy and Tragedy, give such Encouragement to Italian Musick, that if they gave but the like to the proper Entertainments of the Stage, the English would infallibly excell both Ancients and Moderns.

That this Alteration in the Writers and Audiences is to be ascrib'd to the Progress of Musick, rather than attributed to any unknown Cause, or imputed to Fancy, or the Inconstancy of the People, we shall now very clearly shew.

Man is so very Fantastical a Creature, that perhaps he owes his best and his worthiest Actions to what may be properly called his Weakness, that is, to his Vanity, or his Love of Glory. For tho' that depends upon an Opinion of Excellence, which is almost always false, and is therefore truly a Weakness, yet it gives the Mind a Force, an Elevation and an Enthusiasm, which it has not without it, and which make it capable of quite other things than it was before. Now the greater the Action is that any one designs, the more is requir'd of so impetuous a Motive to execute it ; but the writing a Tragedy, or an Epick Poem, being perhaps the greatest thing that a Man can design, and it being impossible to succeed in Poetry without Enthusiasm, the Epick, the Tragick, and indeed all Poets who aspire to the greater Poetry, have occasion for so enthusiastick a Motive as the Love of Glory ; if they write with any other view than to be praised, than to be admired, they must certainly write contemptibly, nay, they ought to propose to themselves to raise their Reputations equal to the first of Men, to place

place themselves among the Benefactors of Mankind, and rank their Glory with the deathless Fame of the Heroes whom they celebrate. But that this Vanity may be nourish'd and supported in them, they must actually find themselves prais'd by the best of Men, and meet with an Admiration equal to the Idea which they conceive of their Labours. But if either that Praise is wanting, or if it is shar'd by the Professors of inferior or illiberate Arts; if upon the very Stage the Capital of the Muses *Dominion*, and the Poets *Domain*, not only Composers, but ev'n Singers and Dancers, meet with greater Applause, and greater Encouragement, what wonder if their Pride is immediately mortify'd, and their Fire extinguish'd.

Thus Musick has caus'd so great a Change in our Writers, because it has wrought so great a one in our Audiences, and it will certainly work a greater in both if it goes on Triumphantly; for the generality of our Audiences are far more capable of a Pleasure of Sense than of a Delight of Reason. Now Musick that is not subservient to Reason, especially if it be soft and effeminate, is a meer Delight of Sense; and as some body has observ'd that Friendship grows insipid to those who have tasted of Love, it grows exceeding difficult, ev'n for those who are capable of the severe Delights of Reason to make a pleasing Return to them, if they have at any time left them for the bewitching Pleasure of Sense. Man naturally pursues Pleasure and flies from Pain, and endeavours to be happy at as little Expence as he can, and therefore the Delights of Sense are preferred to reasonable Pleasures, because the Soul takes in the first without any effort, but the last require severe Preparation, or at the least Attention. In short, if 'tis so hard to part with sensual Pleasures, after they are once become habitual,

bitual, tho' all a Man's Interest and his whole Reputation require it, how much more difficult must it be, when these two powerful Motives are wanting.

Perhaps too the Pride and Vanity that is in Mankind, may determine the generality to give into Musick at the expence of Poetry. Men love to enjoy their Pleasures entirely, and not to have them restrain'd by Awe, or curb'd by Mortification. Now there are but few judicious Spectators at our Dramatick Representations, since none can be so, but who with great Endowments of Nature have had a very generous Education, and the rest are frequently mortify'd by passing foolish Judgments; but in Musick the Case is vastly different, to judge of that requires only Use and a fine Ear, which the Footman often has a great deal finer than his Master. In short, a Man without common Sense may very well judge of what a Man writes without common Sense, and without common Sense composes.

Since then we have made it appear so plainly, that by introducing Entertainments of meer Musick among us, we must of necessity banish Poetry; let us now enquire of what consequence the doing that must be to the Reputation and the Interest of *England*.

Now the Interest and Reputation of any Nation consists in Power, as Power consists in the Wisdom, Numbers, and Spirit of the People, but the chiefest of these is the Spirit, since that is capable of making the other two, but without that the other two are of no signifi-
ficancy.

Now publick Spirit includes two things, Zeal and Affection, for the Honour and Interest of ones Country, and Courage and Resolution to put any thing in Practice that may promote its Service or Glory.

Now

Now if we can shew that Poetry augments this Spirit where ever it finds it, and sometimes begets it where it was not before, and that meer Musick, such as is that of our Opera's, is so far from begetting this Spirit where it was not before, or from augmenting it where it meets with it, that it has a natural tendency to the diminishing it, and destroying it, then I hope it will be readily granted, that since publick Entertainments of meer Musick and Poetry are incompatible, and that we must banish one and retain the other, it will be reasonable to banish the Opera and not Poetry.

If the Entertainment which we have from our Opera's is a meer sensual Pleasure, which says nothing either to enlighten the Understanding or to convert the Will, it is impossible to conceive, how it can either raise the Passions to correct them, or infuse generous sentiments into the Soul, to exalt and confirm the Reason, or to inspire publick Spirit, and publick Virtue, and elevated notions of Liberty.

It belongs to Poetry only, to teach publick Virtue and publick Spirit, and a noble contempt of Death, with an Expression and with an Air becoming of its God-like Notions. That alone can worthily tell Mankind that we were not born for our selves; that we were fram'd and contriv'd for Society by an All-wise Maker; and that the greatest of Men are Miserable if they are long in Solitude. That so great is the sympathy of Souls, that it is impossible for a thinking Man to be Happy, but in the common Felicity of his Fellow Creatures; that He who never did any thing to promote that, never felt perfect Pleasure; that Man has infinitely more Pleasure, ev'n of Sense, from those acts by which he maintains his Species, than he has from those by which he preserves himself. What Raptures
of

of mind must those Heroes feel, whose Virtue has been the preserver of Nations, and made a World Happy ! That great Minds bravely contemn Death to further that Felicity ; that Fate is unavoidable to Mankind, and that Thirty, Forty, Fifty Years is so very much nothing in the view of a comprehensive Soul, that a Hero must esteem it wiser as well as nobler, rather than languishingly to expect Death, to go out and meet him for the publick good, and so to make a sublime Virtue ev'n of the last necessity : That what we call Life here is not properly the Hero's Life, that almost half of it is pass'd in absolute Death, and the rest in Desire, in Grief, in Love, in Rage, in Pain. And that the bright and eternal Fame, to which great Minds aspire, is never fully attain'd to here ; that the Names of the greatest Heroes are circumscrib'd by narrow bounds both of time and space ; and that their best and their bravest Actions, are mistaken and misinterpreted by some, ev'n of those who have the fortune to hear of them, that they are traduced by others envied by more, that that is properly the Hero's Life, when set free from these mortal Bonds, he shall arrive at that blissful Mansion which is on purpose prepar'd for those illustrious Souls, who by making it their business here below to do good to their Country and Mankind, have practis'd the noblest and most extensive Charity that divinest Poets can teach or God Himself can inspire ; that there they shall enjoy a Life, which shall be for ever set free from Death, there their Happiness shall far surpass ev'n what the Heart of Man can conceive, and their Glory transcend ev'n their own aspiring Wishes.

These Godlike Sentiments exalted Poetry instills into Mankind, and by infusing these inspires us with a Zeal and Affection for our Country's Service, and with a generous contempt of Death in time of the publick Danger.

ger. And as there is no other principle of humane Action but Sentiment, it is wholly impossible but that a People habituated to these Heroick Notions must be prepar'd and form'd for the performing Heroick Actions.

These unspeakable advantages has lofty Poetry over empty sounds, and harmonious trifles, which, as the pleasure that they give us is a sensual Delight, utterly independant of Reason, must do something directly opposite to this, since 'tis natural to sense to bring a Man home to himself, and confine him there, as 'tis natural to Reason to expand the Soul, if I may have leave to use the expression, and throw it out upon the Publick : And as soft and delicious Musick by soothing the Senses, and making a Man too much in Love with himself, makes him too little fond of the publick, so by emasculating and dissolving the mind, it shakes the very foundation of Fortitude, and so is destructive of both branches of the publick Spirit.

But if any one objects that an Opera may be so contriv'd and Writ, as to inspire us with an affection for the Publick, and with a generous contempt of Death ; to him I answer, that an Opera so design'd, must be writ with force or without it. If 'tis writ with force 'tis incompatible with Musick, especially in so masculine a Language as ours ; for force in our Language cannot be express'd without a great many Consonants, and Words that terminate in Consonants ; but a great many Consonants and especially Consonants terminating Words, cannot be pronounced without very frequently shutting the mouth, which is diametrically opposite to the expressing of Musick.

But if an Opera so design'd is not writ with force, I leave it to any one to judge, whether the weakness of the expression and of the sentiments, are like to make Im-
C
pression

pression enough to work any change in the Souls of an Audience, or if they are not like to be wholly lost in the softness of luscious sounds; or if the mind is fit to attend to its duty, while the whole Man is dissolv'd in the wantonness of effeminate Airs.

After what has been said, I appeal to any Lover of his Country, if Poetry which begets a publick Spirit, ought to be banish'd for Musick which destroys it, which as it corrupts Mankind has a natural tendency to the Inslaving them; and indeed where-ever Opera's have been a constant Entertainment they have been attended with slavery. We are at present contending for Liberty, and hard is the Contention, and the event doubtful, and we cannot so much as hope to succeed, but by the Virtue of that magnanimous Spirit, which Poetry exalts, and which effeminate Musick debases.

I know not by what Fate it has happen'd, that when in some late Reigns, in which Arbitrary Pow'r was the thing that was aim'd at, the Stage the Protector of Liberty was chiefly encourag'd, in a Reign like this which Designs and Breaths forth nothing but Liberty; Pleasures should be encourag'd ev'n by Lovers of Liberty, which are Independant of Reason, and tend to nothing but Slavery. A long experience has told us, that what My Lord Roscommon has said in his Essay on translated Verse is true.

*True Poets are the Guardians of a State,
And when they fail portend approaching Fate.
For that which Rome to Conquest did inspire,
Was not the Vestal but the Muses Fire;
Heav'n Joyns the Blessings, no declining Age
E're feels the Raptures of Poetick Rage.*

The Declension of Poetry in Greece and Ancient Rome was soon follow'd by that of Liberty and Empire. And the

the very Spirit of Propheſie, which was the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, departing from the Jews in the Babylonish Captivity, was a fatal Omen that Liberty and Empire were never to flourish more with them.

That the Declenſion of Poetry ſhould portend the fall of Empire is not without very good Reason. Becauſe it ſhews a ſlackning of the publick Spirit, and an increaſe of univerſal Corruption, which prepares the Fate of Empires, as a ſpreading mortification fore-runs the Fate of Men. If a Poet is not admir'd, tho' the Man may live, the Spirit of the Poet dies, but a People to admire thoſe generous Sentiments which abound in Poetry, muſt at leaſt have ſomething in them that answers to them: If they once grow wholly immerſt and ſunk in Pleaſures of ſenſe, thoſe elevated Notions appear as ſo many Libels upon them, and their ſickly Souls either turn away from them, or very feebly answer to them. In ſhort, where-ever there is either the Love of Liberty or the Love of Glory, a true Poet may well be admir'd, and in how wretched a condition muſt the Nation be where both thoſe Qualities are wanting. From what has been ſaid 'tis manifeſt that it behoves us to think, before we fully reſolve upon baniſhing ſo uſeful an Entertainment as that of the *Drama*, for the pernicious Amuſement of Opera's.

The *Drama* was eſtabliſh'd here in *England* at the ſame time with Reformation and Liberty: For the *Drama* was ſet up in the Reign of Qu. *Elizabeth*, in whole Reign the Reformation was fully eſtabliſh'd, and before which the People of *England*, for Reaſons too long to be Inſerted here, could hardly be ſaid to be entirely free. As the *Drama* came in with them, it has flouriſh'd with them, and gone a good way towards the ſupporting that Spirit of Liberty on which the Reformation depends. It would here be eaſie to make an odd Remark, and that is, that

the *Drama* had never like to have fall'n, but that and Liberty stumbled almost together.

In the time of the late Civil Wars, when the Bigotry of Hypocritical Zeal had once suppress'd our Theatres, a Military Government soon follow'd, which is the worst of Slaveries.

And when in the Reign of King *Charles II*, upon the breaking out of the Popish Plot, the Theatres were both abandon'd, it was not long before all the Charters were surrender'd.

And yet tho' the Reformation and Liberty and the Drama were establish'd among us together, and have flourish'd among us together, and have still been like to have fall'n together ; notwithstanding all this, at this present Juncture, when Liberty, and the Reformation are in the utmost Danger, we are going very bravely to oppress the Drama, in order to establish the luxurious Diversions of those very Nations, from whose Attempts and Designs both Liberty and the Reformation are in the utmost Danger.

That so unhappy a Change will be as little conducive to the Glory of *England*, as it will be to its Interest, is not in the least to be doubted ; for what must those Strangers say who arrive among us, if they have any taste, when they behold a People so lofty, so fierce, and formerly so famous for their Contempt of Foreign Manners, forgetting their old Pride to so strange a degree, that very Pride by which they have so long maintain'd their Liberties, to imitate the prodigious Luxury of *Italy* with an awkward and vile Imitation, and some Men of the greatest Parts in the Kingdom, applauding and encouraging that vile Imitation with all their Industry and all their Diligence, and in order to that discountenancing instructive Comedy, in which the English

lish excel Mankind, and neglecting the most noble and most beneficial of all Entertainments, Tragedy; in which Nature has qualify'd us to excel all the Moderns.

What must those Strangers say, when they behold Englishmen applaud an Italian for Singing, or a Frenchman for Dancing, and the very Moment afterwards explode an Englishman for the very same things? What must they say, unless they have Candour enough to interpret it this way, that an Englishman is deservedly scorned by Englishmen, when he descends so far beneath himself, as to Sing or to Dance in publick, because by doing so he practises Arts which Nature has bestow'd upon effeminate Nations, but denied to him, as below the Dignity of his Country, and the Majesty of the British Genius.

What must those Strangers say, when they see that we leave so reasonable and so instructive an Entertainment as Tragedy, for one so pernicious and so extremely absurd; for there is something in the Italian Opera, which is Barbarous and Gothick, and so contrary to a true Taste, that an Opera in any Country can be only advanc'd by the same Degrees that the Taste of Men is debauch'd for more generous Arts. Thus in *Italy*, where an Opera is most advanc'd, there is no one who can write either Verse or Prose, nor any one who can judge of them. For when once the Italians were fall'n so low, as to prefer Sound to Sense, they quickly grew to write such Sense that Sound deserv'd to be prefer'd to it.

If that is truly the most Gothick, which is the most oppos'd to Antick, nothing can be more Gothick than an Opera, since nothing can be more oppos'd to the ancient Tragedy, than the modern Tragedy in Musick, because the one is reasonable, the other ridiculous;
the

the one is artful, the other absurd ; the one beneficial, the other pernicious ; in short, the one natural, and the other monstrous. And the modern Tragedy in Musick, is as much oppos'd to the Chorus, which is the Musical part of the Ancient Tragedy, as it is to the *Episodique*; because in the Chorus the Musick is always great and solemn, in the Opera 'tis often most trifling and most effeminate ; in the Chorus the Musick is only for the sake of the Sense, in the Opera the Sense is most apparently for the sake of the Musick.

When I affirm that an Opera after the Italian Manner is monstrous, I cannot think that I deal too severely with it ; no not tho' I add, that it is so prodigiously unnatural, that it could take its beginning from no Country, but that which is renowned throughout the World, for preferring monstrous abominable Pleasures to those which are according to Nature.

But yet this must be allow'd, that tho' the Opera in *Italy* is a Monster, 'tis a beautiful harmonious Monster, but here in *England* 'tis an ugly howling one. What then must not only Strangers, but we our selves say, with all our Partiality to our selves, when we consider that we not only leave a reasonable Entertainment for a ridiculous one, an artful one for an absurd one, a beneficial one for a destructive one, and a very natural one for one that is very monstrous ; but that we forsake a most noble Art, for succeeding in which we are perhaps the best quality'd of any Peeple in *Europe*, for a very vile one for which Heaven and Nature have not at all design'd us, as having given us, neither Ears, nor Voices, nor Languages, nor Climate proper to it. *England* may certainly with a little Encouragement produce the greatest Tragick Poets in *Europe*, but there is scarce one Nation in the Christian World, but is qualify'd

fy'd to surpass us in Opera's, since they are almost all situated under a serener Sky.

If a private Man who mistakes his Talent, and applies himself to things, for which neither God nor Nature have qualify'd him, does by that very choice deface all his good Qualities, and render himself contemptible to the World, how much more dishonourable must it be for a whole Nation?

As all Kingdoms that are in different Latitudes, have Plants with very different Properties, so have they Natives with very different Talents. If any Yeoman of *Kent* or *Sussex*, should neglect to sow his Wheat or his Barley, should grub up his Fruit Trees, and demolish his Hop Grounds, and fall a planting the Olive of Lucca, the Orange of Naples, and the Muscatello of Montefiascone, or of Mont-Alchin; what would his Neighbours think of such a Proceeding? And yet that Person would plainly aspire in his choice. What then, must not the French and Italians think of us, who despise the most generous Productions of our own Minds, and indeed of the Mind of Man, for the vilest of theirs of which we are not capable. Let us take heed, that as we have taken the Opera from the Nations which we despise, it renders us not contemptible to those very Nations.

F I N I S.

P O S T S C R I P T.

Since the Printing of this Essay, I have been inform'd by very good Hands, that a young Lady of the first Quality, equally famous for her Beauty, her Spirit, and her Virtue, did lately to the Glory of her own Sex, and the Shame of ours, give very strict Order, that the *Julius Caesar* of *Shakespear*, which was acted at her Request, should be done without any Performance either of Singing or Dancing. Which Order has shewn that she is as much distinguish'd by the Beauty of her Mind, as by that of her Person; and as every Grace has been always a constant Attendant on her, 'tis become the Duty of every Muse to wait on her, and to return her Thanks for making way by her illustrious Example, for the delivering English Poetry from the Oppression of Foreign Luxury, as every Englishman is bound to extol the Heroe from whom she sprung, for lessening in English Hearts the Apprehension of Foreign Tyranny. I make no doubt but that her attractive Example will have much more Influence upon the World than these few Speculations, and raise a noble Emulation in her Sex, and a just Confusion in ours. May she be follow'd by every fair one, as *Venus* is by the Graces, but after they have all in imitation of her, combin'd to banish foreign Foppery from off the English Stage, may the Glory of the Triumph be peculiarly hers, who first so happily shew'd the way to conquer it, as her illustrious Father will justly share in the Honour of every Confederate General, because all Victories that are to come will be influenc'd by that Immortal one, which shew'd us first that the French are not Invincible.

